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Multi-stakeholder dialogue

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Note by the Secretariat

Summary

From its inception, the United Nations Forum on Forests has been highly participatory in its outlook. Participation by major groups in Forum sessions and related meetings has been recognized as a key element in ensuring stakeholder involvement in forest decision-making processes. At the same time, United Nations Forum on Forests resolutions and decisions have recognized the vital role of stakeholders in the implementation of sustainable forest management. At its seventh session, the Forum adopted the landmark, non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests and the multi-year programme of work of the Forum for the period 2007-2015, both of which call for active and effective participation by major groups in the future work of the Forum and in support of the International Year of Forests in 2011.

The present note gives an account of relevant developments since the seventh session of the Forum and offers a number of measures the Forum may wish to consider in order to continue enhancing substantive contributions by major groups to its discussions.

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I. Introduction

1. The present note has been prepared to facilitate the multi-stakeholder dialogue at the eighth session of the United Nations Forum on Forests. Discussion papers prepared by the major groups and delivered through their focal points are contained in addenda to the present note.

2. Since its inception, the Forum has recognized the important contributions of major groups, as identified in Agenda 21, in implementing sustainable forest management, and has worked towards enhancing stakeholder participation in its work. At its seventh session, the Forum adopted the landmark, non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests (forest instrument)[1] and the multi-year programme of work of the United Nations Forum on Forests for the period 2007-2015,[2] both of which call for active and effective participation by major groups in the future work of the Forum and in support of the International Year of Forests in 2011.

3. In 2008, representatives of major groups actively participated in two country-led Forum initiatives held in Durban, South Africa (April 2008) and Paramaribo (September 2008) and in the Forum ad hoc expert group meeting convened to develop proposals for the voluntary global financial mechanism/portfolio approach/forest financing framework in Vienna (November 2008).

4. Pursuant to United Nations Forum on Forests resolution 7/1, a multi-stakeholder dialogue is held as a common item of every Forum session. In order to facilitate the multi-stakeholder dialogue process, major group networks have nominated focal points to assist in coordination of inputs from various major group networks. During intersessional periods, the Forum secretariat works in close collaboration and cooperation with major group focal points to coordinate and plan for the next multi-stakeholder dialogue and discuss other Forum-related issues.

5. The Forum secretariat also works closely with major group focal points to enhance participation in accordance with the rules of procedure of the functional commissions of the Economic and Social Council.

II. Enhancing stakeholder participation in the future work of the Forum

6. The non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests has multiple references calling for participation of stakeholders in implementing sustainable forest management. In the forest instrument, in the section on national policies and measures, Member States committed themselves to create enabling environments to encourage investment and involvement of stakeholders through policies, incentives and regulations;[3] to establish or strengthen partnerships;[4] to promote active and effective participation by major groups in development, implementation and assessment of forest-related national policies, measures and programmes;[5] to promote development and application of scientific and technological innovations for

[1] E/2007/42, para. 1; General Assembly resolution 62/98, annex.
[2] E/2007/42, para. 3.
[3] General Assembly resolution 62/98, para. 6 (h).
[4] Ibid., para. 6 (m).
[5] Ibid., para. 6 (w).

use by forest owners and local and indigenous communities;[6] to support education, training and extension programmes involving stakeholders;[7] and enhance access to forest resources and relevant markets in order to support livelihoods of stakeholders.[8] In the section on international cooperation and means of implementation, the forest instrument contains a call for enhanced access to environmentally sound and innovative technologies for the benefit of local and indigenous communities;[9] enhanced capacity of research organizations to generate and have access to forest-related data[10] and strengthened cooperation and partnerships at the regional and subregional levels.[11]

7. The multi-year programme of work states that each session of the Forum will: provide a platform for dialogue with representatives of major groups and other relevant stakeholders; will further encourage partnerships involving multi-stakeholders; will encourage major groups and other forest stakeholders to contribute and actively participate in Forum discussions and that major groups and other stakeholders are invited to share information on their activities in support of the International Year of Forests.

8. Taking that renewed mandate into account, the Forum may wish to consider ways to enhance direct and substantive involvement of international organizations and major groups in its work. Major groups associations and networks play a vital role in enabling major groups to work effectively with the Forum, given limited financial resources and time. While some groups already have well-established networks which enable effective exchange of experiences and have facilitated the development of a common "group" perspective, there is still room for improvement in that area. To date, the Forum secretariat has been unable to effectively engage the local authorities' major group because of the absence of a suitable network.

9. Representatives of major groups have contributed significantly to the work of the country-led initiatives and to the ad hoc expert group meeting convened in 2008. Their proposals and comments were submitted for discussion in an open and participatory manner alongside those of other experts. Such a practice should be continued in the future, including during the intersessional activities of the Forum. In addition, the positive experience gained from such expert group meetings and past sessions could be used in considering the participation of major groups at future sessions.

10. Major groups have convened several successful organization-led initiatives to contribute substantively to discussions on such issues as the root causes of deforestation, traditional forest-related knowledge and the gender aspects of sustainable forest management. At the United Nations Forum on Forests ad hoc expert group meeting convened in Vienna in November 2008, major groups announced their intent to organize a major groups initiative in late 2009 on the roles of civil society actors and the means of their engagement with the Forum and the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests, as an input to the ninth session of the Forum. Given that such initiatives have provided the opportunity to

[6] Ibid., para. 6 (s).
[7] Ibid., para. 6 (v).
[8] Ibid., para. 6 (y).
[9] Ibid., para. 7 (k).
[10] Ibid., para. 7 (c).
[11] Ibid., para. 7 (q).

consider in-depth analyses, positive experiences and challenges from a major groups perspective, Member States may wish to support such initiatives in the future.

III. Multi-stakeholder dialogue at the eighth session of the Forum

11. Pursuant to its resolution 7/1, the Forum holds a multi-stakeholder dialogue at every session. The Forum secretariat facilitates consultations with the focal points of each major group to plan and prepare for the multi-stakeholder dialogue. The active engagement of stakeholders in the dialogue process is particularly important in ensuring that the discussions at the eighth session reflect a wide range of perspectives and concerns. Given the critical importance of the issues on the agenda of the eighth session of the Forum, and the fact that major groups are an integral part of implementation, their participation in discussions can ensure a greater sense of ownership of the outcomes of the eighth session of the Forum and eventually more effective action on the ground.

12. Based on the positive feedback received on the multi-stakeholder dialogue at the seventh session, it is proposed that the multi-stakeholder dialogue at the eighth session be split into two segments over the two-week session. In the lead-up to the seventh session, it was felt that having a dialogue segment in the second week of the session gave major group representatives an opportunity to discuss issues being raised in the ongoing negotiations.

13. During those dialogue segments, major group representatives will present their priority areas and recommendations set out in their discussion papers, as well as their views on the two main thematic areas of discussion: forests in a changing environment and means of implementation. Major group representatives will continue to be invited to present their views and comments throughout the discussions at the eighth session of the Forum at the discretion of the chair and presiding vice-chairs.

IV. Points for discussion

14. **Member States may wish to consider:**

(a) **Continuing stakeholder involvement in intersessional activities of the Forum in an open and participatory manner;**

(b) **Seeking ways to further improve participatory practices and mainstreaming major groups perspectives into discussions at Forum sessions and related meetings;**

(c) **Supporting the major groups initiative on the roles of civil society actors and the means of their engagement with the Forum and the non-legally binding instrument on all types of forests;**

(d) **Examining ways to encourage participation of those major groups that have so far not been involved with the Forum's work.**